***This Migrant Earth* Discussion Questions**

**“Water, Water Everywhere” (Pages 9-11)**

1. **Why won’t the owner (“the old guy”) let the field hands stop to drink water at all, let them drink the water for the stock, or even let them bring their own water?**

He thinks they are a waste of time and money.

1. **Why do the people listen to him?**

He’s threatened to fire them, so they are afraid of being fired.

1. **What does the owner plan to do to the boy who got a drink from the stock tank? What does the foreman actually do?**

He’s mad at the boy and wants to teach the boy a lesson by firing off a shot to scare him. He shoots the boy in the head.

1. **What happens to the owner after this incident?**

He almost goes crazy, loses part of the land, starts drinking, goes on trial and gets off, tries to kill himself by jumping from a tree, runs out of cash, dresses poorly, etc.

1. **What do you think of this story? Write down your reaction and anything else that comes to mind as you reflect on it.**

Answers will vary. My opinion: I think it’s interesting that the author uses water, a basic necessity for life, to demonstrate some of the suffering migrant workers encounter(ed). The fact that a child is out in the fields is an important aspect of this story as well, which brings to light the realities of child labor and the survival aspect for migrant families. This piece also demonstrates the feeling farmers experience when they cannot harvest their crops quickly enough and when they don’t have enough money to pay workers. It shows the desperate actions that drive migrant workers and landowners alike. Overall, the story hits on some key points.

**“Burnt Offerings” (Pages 12-15)**

1. **What do the Garcías go and watch at the beginning of the story? What does the father Efraín do afterwards with his two sons?**

The Sunday night picture show about a prizefighter; grabs the old boxing gloves, strips his two sons down, rubs alcohol on them, and lets them fight.

1. **What is Efraín referring to when he says: “You know, wouldn’t it be something if one of the kids was real good at this”? What is the “this” and how would their lives change if it were true?**

Boxing; if one of his sons was a champ they’d make thousands of dollars.

1. **Describe Efraín’s view of his family. In other words, how does he feel about his wife and kids? What is one thing that the parents do for their kids that shows how they feel about them?**

He loves his wife and kids very much; they both come home to eat lunch with them at noon since the kids aren’t allowed out in the fields.

1. **What happens to the kids while the parents were working in the fields?**

Seven-year-old Raulito makes his five-year-old sister María and his six-year-old brother Juan put on the boxing gloves and then he rubs alcohol on them (like his father had done) and lets them go at it. Raulito starts to fry some eggs and something must have happened and then the two younger kids end up getting burned alive.

1. **Why is it ironic that the gloves don’t burn up but two of the kids do? What do you think the author is trying to say when he describes the gloves not burning up? Do you have any other reactions to this story?”**

The kids are far more important than the gloves, but the gloves are the things that are preserved. Perhaps the author is trying to point out that our society views objects and work more important than people, specifically children. A few quotes struck me: “Those coops we live in are so damned small, and you know how much stuff we have to keep in there” (15) and “Well, she was all burned up, but the gloves weren’t…Well, that’s the manufacturers, the people who make ‘em. They know what they’re doing” (15).

**“This Migrant Earth” (Pages 75-84)**

1. **Why is his mother crying?**

His aunt and uncle were sick.

1. **What disease do his aunt and uncle have? What happened to them as a result?**

TB (tuberculosis); they died.

1. **Who has the disease now?**

His Pa

1. **Who is the dialogue mainly between in the first section and subsequent sections?**

The oldest son and his mother

1. **Where does the family live?**

In a (chicken) coop

1. **How does the oldest son feel about his parents’ praying and about God?**

It makes him angry because they didn’t do anything to deserve this suffering. He believes God doesn’t care and doesn’t even know they are there.

1. **Read the dialogue below from page 79 again:**

**Oldest brother/son: “Why *us*, Ma? Why should we be treated like animals, yeah. Animals…without hope. And here’s what really kills me, Ma. You know what kind-a hope we got? Do you, Ma? *Our* hope is that *we* make it back here, to this place, next year. There’s some hope, that is. And, and, like you say, we’ll rest when we die. But who wants *that*? Rest when we die…”**

**Ma: “Death will give us peace. And rest…”**

**Oldest brother/son: “…I know what you’re going to say. I know exactly what you’re going to say: ‘The Poor Are Going to Heaven.’ Right?”**

**Why does he feel so hopeless and angry? Have you ever felt that way? Why?**

The only “hope” he has is to continue in the same situation year after year; yes; couldn’t control the circumstances.

1. **What kind of instructions does the oldest brother give to his younger siblings?**

He tells them to slow down and take it easy if they get blurry or dizzy. Later he says to go get a drink if they need it. Then he says to just slow down.

1. **How old is the youngest brother? What happens to him?**

Nine; he gets sick like his dad did.

1. **Read the last section (pages 82-84) again. What do you think of the ending of this story? Is it resolved? Is it a triumphant ending or one of defeat? Did the earth swallow/devour him? (Remember that this story is what the entire book was named after. In Spanish, it is …*y no se lo tragó la tierra*. Take into account what that means.)**

I think it is intense, yet I feel like it is resolved. To me, the ending is one of triumph because he realizes that he can make a better life for himself and not just rest once he’s dead. The earth obviously didn’t swallow him. This is what the entire compilation of stories is about. These individuals do their best to survive and make their lives better by working hard.